



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

Date: Jan. 20, 2016

Contact: *CI-HQ-COMMUNICATIONSEDUCATION@ci.irs.gov
IRS – Criminal Investigation

CI Release #: CI-2016-01-20-E

California Men Charged with Bank Fraud Conspiracy Related to Trademark Scam

Two residents of Glendale, California, were charged in a superseding indictment in connection with a bank fraud scheme involving the proceeds of a mass mailing scam targeting holders of U.S. trademarks.

Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Eileen M. Decker of the Central District of California, Inspector in Charge Robert Wemyss of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) Los Angeles Division, Inspector in Charge David G. Bowers of the USPIS Washington, D.C., Division and Special Agent in Charge Erick Martinez of the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) Los Angeles Field Office made the announcement.

Artashes Darbinyan, 36, and Orbel Hakobyan, 41, were charged in a superseding indictment that was unsealed today in the Central District of California with one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud. Darbinyan was also charged with four counts of mail fraud, three counts of aggravated identity theft, two counts of concealment money laundering and one count of bank fraud for a separate scheme. Hakobyan was also charged with one count of bank fraud.

According to the superseding indictment, Darbinyan operated and controlled Trademark Compliance Center (TCC) and Trademark Compliance Office (TCO), which purported to offer trademark registration and monitoring services. The superseding indictment alleges that, through TCC and TCO, Darbinyan sent mass solicitations offering, for a fee, trademark registration and monitoring services to holders of trademarks recently registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, services which Darbinyan did not intend to, and did not, provide. To accomplish this scheme, Darbinyan used the names of other persons to open accounts for TCC and TCO at "virtual office centers" (i.e., businesses that offered call answering and mail forwarding services) in the Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles areas, and directed employees of the Washington, D.C.-area virtual office centers to forward mail addressed to TCC and TCO – envelopes containing payments from trademark holders – to the virtual office centers in the Los Angeles area, the superseding indictment alleges.

The superseding indictment alleges that from September 2013 through September 2015, the defendants perpetrated a bank fraud scheme by passing the mass mailing scam's proceeds through fake bank accounts, primarily at a Wells Fargo branch in Glendale. According to allegations in the superseding indictment, Darbinyan opened bank accounts using false identities; Hakobyan and Darbinyan deposited the trademark holders' payments into the Wells Fargo bank accounts and, with the assistance of Wells Fargo bank employees, transferred the funds to other accounts under Darbinyan's control and either made cash withdrawals or purchased gold with cashier's checks and wire transfers.

Hakobyan's separate bank fraud charge arises from allegations that he made a fraudulent withdrawal while impersonating one of the supposed account holders.

The charges and allegations in the superseding indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

The USPIIS and IRS-CI investigated the case. Trial Attorney William E. Johnston of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section is prosecuting the case.

#